STRATEGY MANUAL FOR ADVANCED CLINICS

J BARTSCH

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Strategy Manual For Advanced Clinics

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General: The final finishing touch of the sport of curling is strategically, to know how to play the various shots involved in the game and be able to apply them to a playing situation. The Advanced Manual, the last of a series of three preceded by the Novice and Intermediate texts, discusses all the final strategy approaches of curling.

I. How to Play The Shots

A. Takeouts

Open Hits — It was mentioned in the intermediate manual that takeout curling demands a team to have a standardized set of takeout weights (usually three) and signals for calling them. However, the decision relative to which turn to use was not discussed. There are probably four approaches for use of turn, one being individual while the last three are team systems.

Individual Approach — This is the approach used by probably 90% of the curlers, particularly the non-competitive player. Using this method, before calling the turn to be played, the skip might consider the following —

(i) the throwers' turn preference, often dependent upon the location of the rock to be removed;

(ii) the throwers' consistency level using that turn on that part of the ice;

(iii) the ice conditions, such as falls in the ice which may make the use of a particular turn difficult.

The advantages of this approach are obvious if the skip is able to assess each of the factors correctly in the short time available before making a decision. However, the skip usually provides the player with a number of surprises during the course of a game, that is, the skip giving the thrower one turn when the player might have been expecting another. In any event the thrower is only provided with a few seconds of mental preparation for the shot from the time it is called until it must be thrown.

b) **Team Approaches** — The last three approaches are team approaches to calling the turn for open takeouts. Using one of these systems, the team as a whole will use the same turn for particular takeout shots. Only very exceptional circumstances would see the team deviate from their system.

(i) **Inside — Out Takeouts** — Using this approach the broom is always placed on the centre spine side of the rock. The delivered stone will have maximum keen ice to travel on until it reaches the far end where, on outside hits it will encounter heavier side ice. This method is more than acceptable for the inexperienced player as most draw shots are approached in a similar manner. Further, if the team normally plays quiet takeout weights, this system allows good rock control, even without powerful sweeping.

(ii) **Outside — In Takeouts** — Here, the broom is placed on the side of the rock opposite the centre line. The delivered stone travels on the heavier side ice for most of its trip, entering keener center ice as it approaches the house. Teams using heavier takeout weights might find this a consistent method to use. It seems stronger sweeping teams can control the shot better because the rock will stay straighter with sweeping on side ice where much pebble wear is unlikely.

(iii) **One Turn Takeouts** — Here, the open hit is always played by the entire team, with the same turn, for example; the inturn. As with the other team approaches, only exceptional ice conditions would prevent the system from being used. Many will immediately see all sorts of disadvantages to such a system, such as: the player might become less proficient with the other turn and opposing teams can plan strategy to counter your system. On the other hand many teams have found their takeout increased in consistency, primarily as a result of a more consistent release, and better knowledge of ice reaction. It also tends to increase player confidence and make calling sweeping and giving ice an easier task for the skip. Further, some teams in an attempt to counter the one turn strategy, often deviate considerably from their normal approach. Thus, one turn teams often enjoy a psychological edge. Also, each player now has a greater length of time to think about the shot that is to be thrown. With the one turn approach, if the player assumes a takeout is going to be called, then concentration can begin on the shot the instant the opposing team's rock comes to rest. The thrower does not have to wait for the skip to make a decision on which turn is going to be used.

The following guidelines might be helpful in considering the use of a team approach:

(i) Practice time for the "other turn" should be adequate to allow no variance in the skill level. Sometimes takeouts must be played with the opposite turn because of guards and exceptional ice conditions.

(ii) A team approach demands a fairly lengthy trial period for adjustment; this team (and coach) decision should not be cast aside after only a few games.

(iii) Individual strengths and weaknesses are not taken into account with the team system. Therefore,

only above average teams should consider a team approach. Further, individual players who have marked weaknesses using the turn employed by a team system require some heavy practice, preferably with a coach.

(iv) Teams preferring a draw style of play are more likely to prefer the inside out approach to takeouts.

(v) Teams with a preference for takeout style of game are likely to choose the outside in approach (as long as they keep using a firm takeout weight) or a one turn approach.

(vi) Possibly one of the main advantages of the team approach is the extra time available to the thrower in which to think about the shot. Even before the rock is moved from the corner the thrower can begin thinking about the shot. It is known in advance what turn will be called and the thrower will not be surprised in the hack by a skip's call.

A final consideration regarding the playing of open takeouts involves *mental attitude.* Because of the tremendous number of open takeouts played by a competitive player, concentration is often difficult to maintain. Too often the thrower stops thinking the shots through and becomes robot like.

One method of countering the non-thinking tendency is to play every takeout as a precise hit and roll. Thus, the skip calls a hit and roll and the thrower doesn't consider the shot complete until the rock rolls to the spot indicated. So, a hit and stay in the house is not totally satisfactory, the thrower must roll to an exact location to be perfect. The point goes one step further to suggest the theory that one cannot be a precise curler if one has little opportunity to attempt precise takeouts. If every open takeout is considered as a precise shot, then the curler can see his/her progress more realistically. Taking the line of thinking still another step, when a precise takeout (like a hit and roll behind a guard or a double takeout) is called, the probability of making the shot will improve, because the thrower has been practising precise hit and rolls all along.

The above approach also forces the skip to think precisely and may improve his/her reading skills.

2. **Come-Around Takeouts** — The factors to be considered in playing come-around takeouts include:

a) **position of rocks in the house** — rocks in front of the tee are usually played with slightly more weight than rocks behind the tee,

b) **length of the guard** — come-arounds with long guards may be played a little more firmly than short guarded rocks,

c) **amount of rock exposed** — usually more weight can be used when the rock is not totally hidden from the thrower's view,

d) **stage of the game** — with more weight being able to be safely used during the early stages of the contest,

e) **score** — if you're down in points less weight would usually be used on this type of shot,

f) **thrower** — a skip will generally call more weight with a front end player whose weight control is not likely to be as exact as a third's or skip's,

g) **ice conditions** — straight ice usually demands a lighter takeout weight be used for come-arounds,

h) **sweeping abilities** — a team with strong sweeping might consider playing less weight on come-arounds.

From the foregoing it should be evident that not all come-around takeouts should be played with, "just through the house weight". Depending on circumstances, perhaps a middle weight like, "to the boards" or even heavier, should be used on many come-around takeouts. Some teams exhibit remarkable success in executing come-around takouts by sticking to their normal, medium takeout weight.

Whatever weight played, the desired goal is to get the rock out. Often, the secondary goal of removing the guard may be very helpful. To avoid preventing the total miss of both rock and guard, team coordination is required in the following ways:

a) the skip *must not* give excessive ice (too little is better than too much),

b) the thrower *must not* be either wide of the broom, or heavy,

c) the sweepers must know how the ice works on the line being played,

d) must advise the skip of the released weight of the rock, and keep the path of the rock clean or sweep hard as directed. The rock must be followed until it stops. Often, the shooter needs to be swept after the takeout is made.

B. Double Takeouts

There are two basic types of double takeouts.

1. **Vertical Type** — Here, the opposing stones are positioned basically behind one another, perhaps from several centimeters apart to several meters apart. Obviously to execute the double, the initial rock struck must remove the rock behind and roll out itself (Fig 1). For the latter reason a firmer takeout weight is usually required. However, accuracy is the key, so the weight used must be one the thrower is precise with, except "just through the house weight" would not be used. The skip must also plan which side of the first rock is the most desirable to hit for success to be enjoyed. Naturally, the skip will approach the use of turn with a number of things in mind. One of them might be the shooter remaining in a very desirable position, if the double is missed.

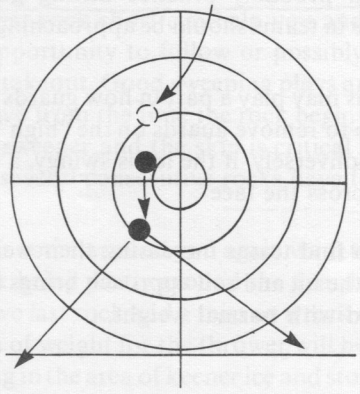

Figure 1

2. **Horizontal Type** — This time the shooter must strike the forward stone and roll almost sideways to remove the second rock (Fig. 2). Again, an increase in weight is usually a must, with the amount depending on the length of roll required and angle of the roll. Many top teams however, stick very close to their normal takeout weight because of increased accuracy.

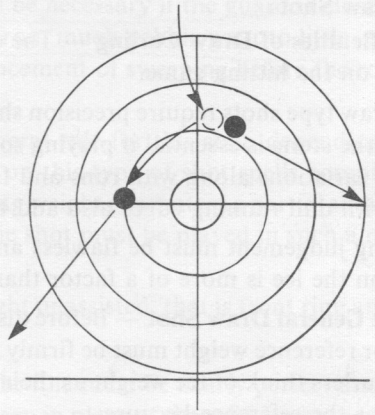

Figure 2

If the team uses the previously mentioned hit and roll approach for all takeouts then this is really just another application of a hit and roll. Indeed, in some situations a hit and roll to the face of the opposing stone may be just as, or more advantageous than the double.

In special cases where a double or hit and roll requires almost a horizontal movement of the shooter, after it strikes the first stone, hitting "across the face" is required rather than using the turn that will hit the rock first on the "high" side. This is because of a difference in the angle of deflection. There would likely be little difference in deflection angles where straight ice is involved. Naturally, where almost horizontal deflection is needed, more weight will be required.

The important factors to consider, especially when the rocks are more than one and one-third meters apart are:

a) Only rarely should the mental attitude of skip and thrower be, "both or nothing".

b) Don't gamble in giving ice or calling weight to the point of reducing accuracy.

c) Both skip and thrower must concentrate on getting the first rock, since the odds on making a "cross house double" of over one and one-third meters is rare except for the best of takeout curlers.

C. Removing Guards

Though often considered easy because the thrower's rock doesn't have to stay and the target is close, removing or peeling guards is difficult. It requires concentration and precision by the thrower if any kind of consistency is to be developed.

Novice and intermediate curlers often use a "spray shooting" approach to remove guards. The skip puts the broom in a location which would usually allow the player to hit the guard on the nose. However, since increased weight is called, it is hoped the thrower will miss the broom by a few centimeters either way which should allow the shooter to roll off.

Advanced and competitive curlers should be more inclined to use a more consistent method by *deliberately* playing to hit the guard on the "high side" (Fig. 3, a) or on the narrow side or "across the face" (Fig. 3, b).

Again, if the hit and roll approach is used on all takeouts this is a further extension of the method.

Ideally, it is usually desirable to strike the guard with the shooter on the side nearest the boards. This is done to insure the shooter has to roll a short distance to be out of play. But, as often occurs, players have their personal preferences regarding which side of the rock they wish to hit. It is usually wise to grant the player's preference. If a team system is used, inside out teams should probably practice hitting guards "across the face"; outside in teams should be approaching the peel from the wide side.

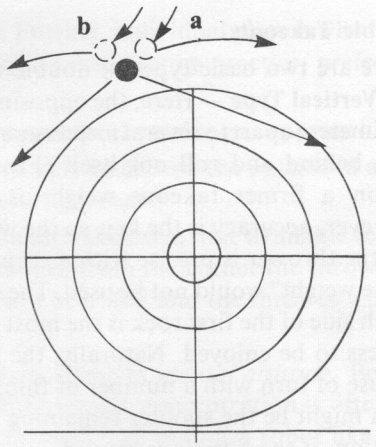

Figure 3

Ice conditions may play a part in how guards are removed. It is possibly wise to remove guards on the "high" side when the ice is straight. Conversely, if the ice is swingy, a case can be made for going "across the face".

It is usual to find teams increasing their weight when removing guards. Many top teams, however, find that normal takeout and the hit and roll approach brings the best result. This is likely due to the fact that accuracy and weight control are optimized with normal weight.

D. The Draw Shots

1. **Difficulties of Draw Curling** — The draw game has a number of difficulties attached to it that have little or no bearing on the hitting game.

Most draw type shots require precision shot making for the ultimate result to be as desired. Exact weight and correct path of the stone is essential if playing something like a come-around or a freeze. Ice conditions such as centre and side ice variations along with runs and falls make the execution of exact draw shots difficult. Unmatched stones along with dull running edges also add to the difficulty and reduction of success.

Sweeping judgement must be flawless and the ability of the sweepers superb for consistency to be enjoyed. Also, debris on the ice is more of a factor than it is with the takeout shot.

2. **The General Draw Shot** — Before discussing specific draw shots let's take a look at draw shots in general. First, a base or reference weight must be firmly fixed in the mind of the thrower in order to execute draw shots effectively. Many curlers think of tee weight as their reference, but this is erroneous. One can make a strong case for front ring weight as the reference because:

a) it is the weight between long guard and back ring,

b) most draws are played to the house. Front ring weight will therefore permit sweeping control for position. The idea is for the thrower to think front ring unassisted and allow the sweepers to position the stone.

c) any shot requiring extra depth in the house or short can be thought of as more or less than the reference point, front ring.

Secondly, it is advisable to have draw shots which can be swept for control. Come-around shots especially can be manipulated with sweeping for improved position behind the guard. This can be especially effective if vigorous sweeping is applied once the draw begins to slow down, from the hog line in. Further, good sweepers seem to be able to sense when the rock is beginning to "dig in" and can use sweeping to effectively position the stone. The importance of good sweeping control and judgement cannot be over emphasized in draw style curling.

Last but not least, draw shots like any other shot must be practised if any kind of weight consistency is to be enjoyed. Two simple drills that might be used are:

a) attempt to throw sixteen rocks into the house without sweeping,

b) attempt eight consecutive freezes in a row, first using one turn and then the other.

3. **Come-Around Draws** — The come-around is the most important of the draw shots and remains the most common way to pick up extra points or steal an end.

a) **The Center Come-Around** — The skip should not broom a center come-around too tight because wrecking on the guard provides nothing, whereas a rock fully exposed has a partial guard since it is psychologically tougher to hit than a wide open shot. Also, this move is usually taking place when the opponent has the hammer,

so wrecking on the front could in fact end up setting two corner guards for the opponent. From this point of view the thrower must know how the ice reacts and must definitely not be narrow. The path of a center come-around will always be from the outside in, that means the stone will *usually* be starting in an area of heavy ice and stopping in an area of keen ice. From this point of view, perhaps more weight will be required than throwing a draw that starts from the center. For the shot to be fully effective it must stop in front of the tee line and partly behind the guard at least. Also, given a choice, being short of the rings is usually more advisable than being too long. Why? You are in all probability trying to steal, so another rock short can help you and hinder the opponent. However, going too deep can give the opponent an opportunity to follow or possibly even leave enough room between the guard and delivered stone to play a quiet takeout. Good sweeping plays an important role in the success of any come-around. This is usually most effective from the time the rock begins to "dig-in" until it comes to a final stop. Communication between the inside sweeper and the skip is critical for line and weight to be effectively judged. This is especially significant after several consecutive rocks have followed the same path, since the stones don't "dig in" in the same manner.

b) **The Side or Corner Guard Come-Around** — As with the center come-around you again want to make sure the rock gets around the guard. The psychological edge of the rock being partly around the guard will prevail more here than with the center guard, because at this point you have last rock and a miss or wreck on the front by the opponent could give you a chance to score two. The situation of weight for the thrower will be the inverse of the center come-around, that is, the delivered stone will be starting in the area of keener ice and stopping in the heavier side ice region. From this point of view extra weight will be necessary if the guard is close to side ice. The sweepers must have a good idea as to where the ice changes from much pebble wear to little, and once the stone begins to reach this area almost over anticipate the commencement of sweeping before the rock starts to noticeably slow down.

c) **Come-Around Tap Back** — "Light and tight" is a good general rule for this shot, depending upon how much of a "must" the shot being played is. Being wide or heavy on this type of shot spells complete disaster because nothing is accomplished. A tight target and lighter, sweeping weight guarantees a partial shot — removal of the guard. Granted, on skips' last shots and at critical times the shot must be played in such a manner that passage by the guard is guaranteed.

From a weight point of view the thrower should think of base weight unassisted, that is front ring and add what is required.

4. **The Raise** — This is a difficult shot, because for the most part the line must be nearly perfect and the weight exact. If there is a choice, a come-around draw would usually be chosen in place of the raise because of the greater margin of error. However, the raise is useful when:

a) the ice is very straight and does not lend itself to come-around,

b) the angle of the raise is not precise and the line has a slight variable (Fig. 4).

When playing a raise, it will take a little more weight to raise a stone to a particular position than to straight draw to the same position.

Obviously the skip will have to give less ice for a raise than a draw because of the increased weight factor. At any rate, the skip must do some careful thinking before putting the broom down.

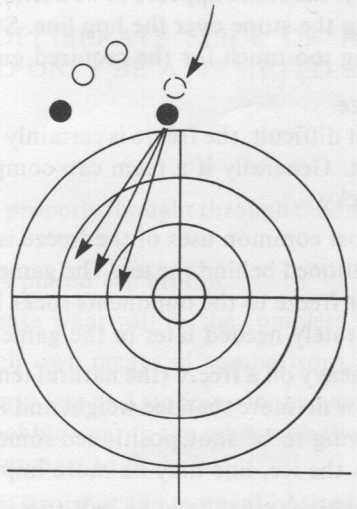

Figure 4

5. **Guards**

There are two types of guards, long and short. The purpose and use of the guards can on many occasions be very different.

a) **Long Guard** — a guard positioned for the purpose of playing come-around (center guard or corner) is usually referred to as a long guard. Why a long guard? If this guard is placed two to three meters in front of the rings, the come-around shot attempted will not have to be as exact. The longer the guard, the more room that can exist between the guard and stone as the stone passes by. Granted, a stone coming by a short guard very close and burying is much more difficult to remove, but usually this type of perfection is not really necessary. If

the team approach is employed on takeouts, then the approach being used when it comes to selecting a turn for the guard will be considered. However, if there is some variation in ice reaction from one turn to the other, be sure to use the turn that will allow the rock to curl the proper amount and bury as desired.

When throwing this type of shot the curler should be thinking of base weight less about five meters, so sweeping can position the shot as desired. Nothing is more demoralizing to a team than a player being asked to put up a guard for the purpose of come-around and the shot ending up in the circles.

b) **Short Guard** — This shot is generally for the purpose of guarding and protecting a stone in the rings. If this type of guard is going to be considered, the rock you are protecting should at least be in the four foot circle, and the guard is being placed because of an attempted steal. Sometimes curlers make the mistake of using this type of shot when they have last stone, which in fact is a wasted rock. Also, if you are going to attempt a steal guarding a stone that is not at least in the four foot this usually doesn't put much pressure on the opponent because they can simply out draw the shot. The reason this type of guard must be short or close to the rings is also an opponent pressure move. When you place the guard, ideally you would like the opponent to attempt a peel and if they are successful, another guard would be placed. However, if the peel was not successful you would have an opportunity to put up a second, longer guard to protect your rock. But, if a long guard was used initially it might have left the opponent enough room between the guard and your shot stone to play, and possibly complete a come-around tap back. Also, the line of the short guard does not have to be as exact as the long to discourage the come-around.

Sweeping this type of shot requires constant communication between the inside sweeper and the skip with the correct judgement of the inside sweeper being critical.

There are important points to be considered when sweeping a guard, some are as follows:

(i) The thrower must be very careful not to turn the rock inside at all, in other words, the release must be positive so the stone runs straight for the first 10-15 meters. Also, the weight must be close to that desired, to place the guard unassisted by brooms. If the guard requires sweeping during the first 15 meters for either weight or line, final positioning as required will be very difficult.

(ii) As the guard begins to reach the distant end it may require considerable curl before it is positioned as desired. Many teams make the mistake of beginning to sweep hard too soon. Sweeping for this purpose should begin just as the rock begins to "dig in" during the last five to ten meters it is in motion. Although the details of the explanation can be confusing, starting to sweep this type of shot too soon often results in the length of time the stone is in motion being less than if the sweeping hadn't commenced until the stone "digs in".

(iii) If the stone appears to be curling too much or too fast *don't sweep at all* unless it is for the purpose of getting the stone over the hog line. Sweeping will keep the stone in motion longer which could result in it curling too much for the required guard.

6. **The Freeze**

If not the most difficult, the freeze is certainly one of the toughest shots in curling, since it demands excellent line and perfect weight. Generally if a team can complete one successful freeze in every eight attempts they can consider themselves lucky.

One of the most common uses of the freeze is in the early ends when you have last rock and the opponent possibly has rocks positioned behind the tee. The game is at a no risk stage, so rather than drop a corner guard you attempt to draw up to, or freeze to the opponents rocks behind the tee. Such a freeze could serve as practice for a freeze which may be desperately needed later in the game.

You can't be heavy on a freeze (the natural tendency is to use the rock for "backing", which causes many freezes to be missed). Throw no more than tee weight and let the sweepers position the stone. The primary concern is for the rock you are throwing to be shot, positioned somewhere in front of the opponent's stone, preferably in direct line. Depending upon the ice, line may be more important than weight.

Generally speaking, skips tend to call too many freezes, especially of the front end players who are not usually accustomed to precise shots. Often corner guards should be considered as a means to attaining extra points particularly as the game progresses. Freezes which are not particularly precise may be defensed by normal takeout procedures, perfect freezes are best defensed by a quiet tap-back. The key is to *remove the backing.* Too many skips defense a freeze with another freeze; which is NOT ALWAYS THAT GOOD.

E. Deliberately Throwing Rocks Through the Rings

At the competitive level of curling this is done when the team in the lead has decided they want to play a clean, wide open, defensive game. This maneuver is usually used in the latter stages of the game when you are several points ahead and don't have last stone. Remember, when you are up points every stone left in play can work out to the opponent's advantage.

F. Blanking Ends

This strategic maneuver is employed on the assumption that it is better to retain last rock than to score one point, when the option exists. It has been the subject of controversy for years, but is now accepted universally by competitive curlers who like to:

1. Gain at least two points when they have last rock;
2. Maneuver, so they have last rock going home.

G. Spreading Rocks to Build Up an End

This applies most when you have last stone. Be sure to keep the rocks spread far apart vertically, but more so horizontally. The closer the rocks, the more susceptible they are to doubles or even triples. Keep the pressure on by preventing the opposition from "making up" for a miss by playing a well executed double. Also, at this time it is usually wise to keep the area in front of the tee as free of rock accumulation as possible, especially the area in the center of the house. Although stones in this area may seem relatively harmless they can spell disaster. How? If spreading stones you are usually playing a defensive type of game which means the opponent has last rock or you aren't deliberately playing aggressively. Sometimes this can be fouled if the opponent hits a higher stone and rolls behind a stone in the rings but in front of the tee line.

H. Multiple Releases

Although it shouldn't be practised by players other than the skip and third, many competitive curlers today use a varied release on their shots in certain situations, let's look at a few examples:

1. In certain takeout situations it is not uncommon for some throwers to deliberately apply more turn to the rock so it is almost a spinner. Why? A faster turning stone will not curl as much as one with less turn; consequently if the shot is thrown a little tight rather than wide a piece of the target is at least guaranteed.

2. On come-arounds it may be difficult on occasion to get a stone to bury because the ice is very straight. Often in this situation a very experienced back-end player will come out with a very delicate or quiet release on the stone. Why? The stone with the easy, slow rotating handle will curl a little more than the shot released with a definite, positive release. Often the slight adjustment is enough to get the stone to bury behind the guard. Also, if the opposing skip is not watching closely he/she may not realize the release has been adjusted and may fall into a trap because of being non-attentive.

THIS PRACTICE COULD BE COMPARED TO THE DELIBERATE SLICE OR HOOK IN GOLF. HOWEVER, THESE TYPE OF ADJUSTMENTS SHOULD ONLY BE ATTEMPTED BY THE HIGHLY EXPERIENCED PLAYER.

I. Shot Thinking Process

How many times in a game is a shot missed because the thrower hasn't properly thought through the entire attempt before commencing the delivery? So, what should be thought of?

As an example let's take a look at a come-around once the skip has placed the broom:

1. How does the ice curl in that particular spot, and with release what will be the complete reaction?
2. What is draw weight down center? (each individual has their own means of comparison).
3. Am I starting in the center of the ice where the surface is fairly fast and stopping in the heavy side area or vice versa? If so, at what point will my stone move from the area of pebble wear to the other with the present curl of the ice? Or is the stone going to stay in either fast or heavy ice from start to finish?
4. How much can I rely on my sweepers for this shot? Are they strong at the moment or tired from sweeping the last two or three shots hard? In all likelihood I'll have to make certain the weight is correct, because I can't rely on my sweepers as much as I would like to. Although the come-around is a fairly complex example, every shot thrown in a game requires the same sort of deductive process.

II. PLAYING THE GAME

Determining the correct style of game, draw or takeout, depends upon a number of factors. These factors are reviewed in the chart below.

Draw	Takeout
Late in game	Early in game
Down in points	Up in points
With last rock	Without last rock
Tougher opponent	Weaker opponent
Swingy ice	Straight ice
Ice with normal weight	Exceptionally keen or heavy ice

A similar chart might be useful for a novice or intermediate skip as a means of assessing the factors present which would therefore suggest a tendency to play a certain style of game. The presence of two or more of the factors under any particular heading would suggest that style of play be used.

Though such a chart does not do an acceptable job with every situation it does serve as a handy guide.

II. A. The Psychological Edge

Now, the time has finally come to put it all together, you are about to step on the ice to be part of a competitive contest. So, what should you be thinking about and how might you go about preparing yourself mentally?

Without going into a great detail about psychological performance or arousal levels, let's take a brief look at what a curler should be doing prior to an important match.

For the most part this is an aspect that most athletes have a serious concern for, but curlers take it far too lightly. As a result many find themselves tensing up in a key game or losing the ability of absolute concentration when faced with a difficult situation. Curling is a game of the mind with little opportunity for release other than through sweeping. In addition, the game requires self-confidence and mental concentration second to no other sport. So, it is obvious that each member of a team needs to begin a scheduled mental preparation at least an hour prior to a game.

The preparation should probably find each athlete in silence or quiet conversation with teammates discussing:

1. Game strategy,
2. The opponent's abilities,
3. Mental review of technical aspects.

The main outcome of the above should be, each individual's mind channeled toward one thing and one thing only, the game at hand and *performance*. As soon as one game is over you begin preparing for the next.

B. The Early Ends

The early ends in a curling game basically conclude when a team has completely grasped the feel of the conditions and are prepared to deliberately use an offensive approach. This feeling could come as early as the second end or as late as the fourth.

1. Feel of The Ice

Certainly, curling differs from other sports in many ways, but one of the substantial differences is the fact curling is played on a surface that changes from game to game and sometimes from end to end. Curlers who have thrown a stone in anger have been told by someone along the way to study the sheet of ice they are going to be playing on next. That statement has gotten a good number of curlers in trouble, because what is happening on a sheet of ice now, might totally change by the time the next contest starts. And to that the inquisitive curler might ask why? Many factors contribute to what happens on a sheet of curling ice. First, the brine running through the artificial ice pipes must be at a degree that will keep the temperature of the ice surface constant. Many times this is a factor if the technician allows the ice to get too thick, and possibly the ice plant with warm outdoor temperatures is unable to keep the temperature constant. Most can remember having been the last team left playing in a particular facility, and all at once the reaction of the ice surface seems to change. Again, as the temperature of the air changes so does the temperature of the surface and very likely the reaction of the ice. However, the all important factor is the pebble. The common practice is to fully pebble each sheet of ice end

to end prior to the start of each game. When fresh pebble is applied the reaction of a sheet of ice might be completely different from what it was in the previous game. Also, the technique used by the person applying the pebble, what size of pebble head is used, and the temperature of the water is also a key factor.

With all of the aforementioned in mind, it is definitely wise for a team to approach the first end of a game with caution *and certain approaches are normally not used.* First, the lead player must be cautioned to throw the first rock in the circles or through. With an equal opponent the last thing on earth you want to happen is for a come-around game to be established by the time your lead has delivered the first stone, because it was thrown short. So, make sure the first rock is thrown in the circles and use both turns as soon as possible so some idea of ice reaction is established. However, a word of caution, suppose your lead has successfully completed an in turn draw and the opposition removes the stone and rolls out. It might be wise to have him/her throw the in turn again rather than the out, since often the weight on one side of the ice versus the other is slightly different and can be the cause of the player throwing an unwanted stone in front of the circles. Also, the player throwing might not throw the opposite turn as well, so it could be difficult to read anything from the shot.

Whenever possible the skip should give all players a chance to get the feel of draw in the early going, since draw weight is the reference point of all weight control. But, as mentioned DON'T BE SHORT OF THE HOUSE IN THE EARLY ENDS.

2. **Objectives With and Without Last Rock**

In competitive curling today the right to last stone in the first end has become extremely critical. The game has progressed to such an extent that a slight error by the team with last rock can result in the opponent picking up a pair of points, which at times is enough for victory. In the early ends the game to some degree is played the same with or without last stone, that is primarily defensively, with a few exceptions. The following rules of thumb hold true when in possession of the last rock in the early going.

a) Make a special attempt to keep the center four meters of ice free of guards. If a stone becomes positioned in this area (yours or the opponents) most definitely peel it. Don't deliberately put up a corner guard, but if a stone falls short of the circles to the side, over concern is not necessary. Some skips might choose to peel it, while others would elect to draw the open side of the house and see what happens (Fig. 5).

If the opportunity for a free draw arises, draw to the outside of the circles rather than down the middle. With last stone in your favour a rock positioned on the center line in front of the circles or in the close proximity can spell trouble. By playing to the outside of the circles a rock coming up short should not be of any great concern (Fig. 6).

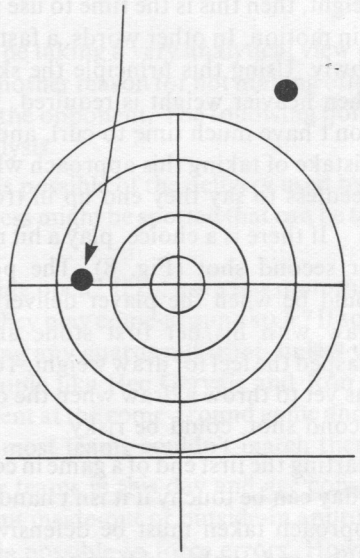

Figure 5

b) Generally you would not use a corner guard at this stage of the game unless you were to find yourself in trouble. Trouble could be the existence of more than one corner guard which would leave little choice except to draw around one of them (Fig. 7).

If given the choice of which corner guard to use as illustrated in Fig. 7 the following should be done:

(i) if the player throwing has a preference of turn and the ice is curling well with that turn, use it;

(ii) go with the turn that will bury the best;

(iii) use the guard that is longer if there is little difference in the amount of curl so there will be more room to work with;

(iv) all things being equal go behind your own stone versus the opponents.

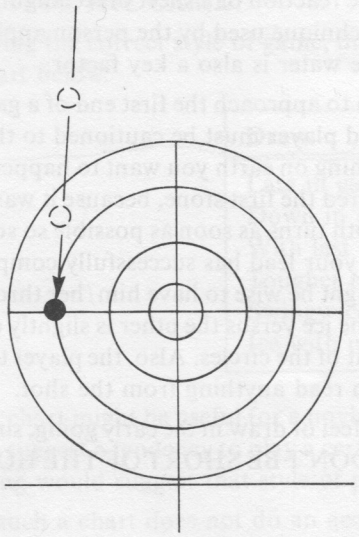

Figure 6

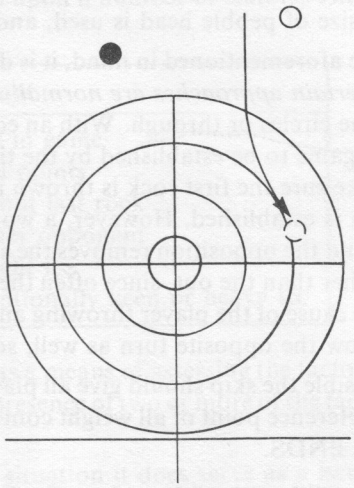

Figure 7

For the most part, neither team is very sure of draw weight in the early going so any come-around is high risk. However, there are exceptions to every rule. Some of the best skips have enjoyed success because on occasion they provided an important element of surprise. There are, however, points that must be remembered and appreciated, those skips for the most part had excellent players in front of them, possessing a great sense and feel for weight. Secondly, they would seldom use the move against teams who hadn't indicated a weakness from past experience. Skips that consistently try to put the game away in six ends by playing come-around early often find the game over early, but not in their favour.

c) If your players have the physical and throwing ability to deliver an accurate take out with a little extra weight, then this is the time to use it. The amount a stone curls from end to end is dependant on how long it is in motion. In other words, a fast moving stone on all ice conditions will curl less, than one that is moving slowly. Using this principle the skip doesn't have to be overly accurate with the placement of the broom when heavier weight is required. Regardless of the reaction, the stone will be moving fast enough that it won't have much time to curl, and a piece of the rock should usually be guaranteed. Many skips make the mistake of taking this approach when their players aren't capable of throwing the bigger weight accurately. Needless to say they end up in trouble more often than not.

d) If there is a choice, play a hit rather than a draw for second shot (Fig. 8). The possible exception could be when the player delivering has thrown a draw with his/her first stone and has obviously grasped the feel for draw weight. To ask a player who has yet to throw a draw when the opponent is sitting second shot, could be risky.

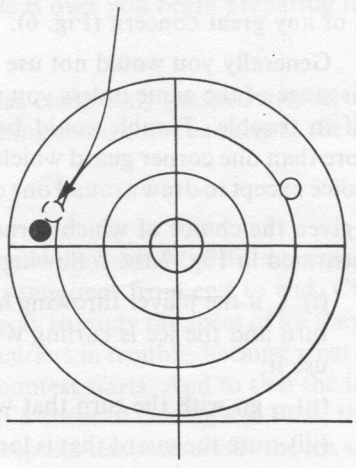

Figure 8

Starting the first end of a game in competitive curling today can be touchy if it isn't handled correctly. The approach taken must be defensive throughout the entire end, unless difficulty arises as a result of misses. General rules to follow are:

a) hit everything the opponent puts into the rings, even third shot (Fig. 9). This is a no risk stage of the game and every stone the opponent has in the house could haunt you before the end has concluded;

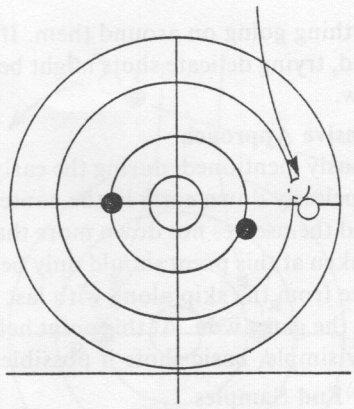

Figure 9

b) when the opportunity arises for a free draw to the rings the situation that existed with the last stone is now reversed. Before, the free draws went to the outside of the rings and now they should be directed toward the center of the house with the four foot circle as the target (Fig. 10). Again, if the stone the player is throwing was to come short of the circles it is most definitely in an area where the opponent doesn't want it. If you were to throw to the outside and fall short without the last stone there are some skips even at this stage of the game who might go around it.

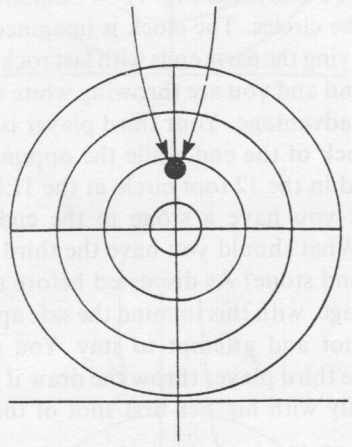

Figure 10

c) Good teams will very often remove everything in play at this time, even corner guards to avoid all risk.

3. **Analyze the Opponent**

This is one time in the game that the skip and all players must be taking a very analytical view of the opposing team, particularly if the opponent is not a familiar one. This is another reason for not making offensive advances until it has been determined where ground might be gained on the opponent. The following points are a review from Level II and should be the focal point of early end analysis.

a) **The Delivery** — Try and do as thorough an analysis as possible of the delivery used by each opposing team member. By the time the third end concludes a weakness might be spotted that can be taken advantage of before the game is over.

b) **What Style of Game Do They Play** — Do they play wide open? If so, use a few more guards, the opponent will in all probability attempt to remove them. Or, do they play come-around style? If so, this is the time to play in the rings and be very cautious about not allowing any guards out front, unless you feel shot for shot you can match them at come-around if need be. People like Hec Gervais and Ron Northcott were masters of this type of approach for years. They were excellent at the come-around game and would attempt to lure some opponents into it early, because they knew most teams couldn't match them.

c) **Do They Prefer One Turn Hits?** — Many competitive teams in this day and age consistently use one turn or the other, while others prefer the use of a consistent inside-out or outside-in approach. Very often by forcing them away from their preferred approach it is possible to force errors. However, a word of caution, many competitive teams will use this approach and by doing so force themselves to play shots and turns they aren't confident of.

d) **Are Your Opponents Proficient Sweepers?** — Awareness of the opposing team's sweeping ability helps to diagnose the preferred shot at a particular time. How? By always expecting a strong sweeping team to prefer a draw over a takeout in a critical situation. Teams with weak sweeping have less chance of successfully completing crucial draws. So force them to play that type of shot.

e) **Do the Opposing Skip and Players Concentrate on the Game?** — For the opposing team to sweep critical draws effectively and play delicate shots such as come-arounds, the players must all be aware of

everything going on around them. If the opposing skip has a nonchalant attitude, and the early ends have passed, trying delicate shots might be advisable. If your foes aren't attentive they may not be certain how to follow.

4. **Defensive Approach**

As previously mentioned, during the early ends little risk should be taken by either team unless they find themselves hopelessly down early in the contest because of misses. Through primarily defensive play a team would like to find themselves not down more than one with last rock at the conclusion of the third end. For certain any gamble taken at this point should only be considered toward the latter stages of the end, and a special feeling of confidence from the skip along with last stone is essential. Basically, test the opposition and if they falter you may have the game won. At this point help your players build confidence for the balance of the game by having them play simple, basic shots if possible. Stay away from freezes, raises, guards, etc.

5. **Early End Samples**

Situation #1 Shown in Fig. 11 — Sometimes reference is made to the face of a clock when describing rock positions in the circles. The clock is imagined as indicated in figure 11. This exact situation was mentioned earlier under playing the early ends with last rock advantage. It is the first end and you are throwing white stones and have last rock advantage. Your third player is throwing their second rock of the end while the opponent has a stone positioned in the 12 foot circle at the 11:00 o'clock position, and you have a stone in the eight foot at 3:00 o'clock. What should you have the third player do with their second stone? As discussed before the game is at a no risk stage, with this in mind the safe approach is to hit second shot and attempt to stay. You might consider having the third player throw the draw if he/she threw it successfully with his/her first shot of the end.

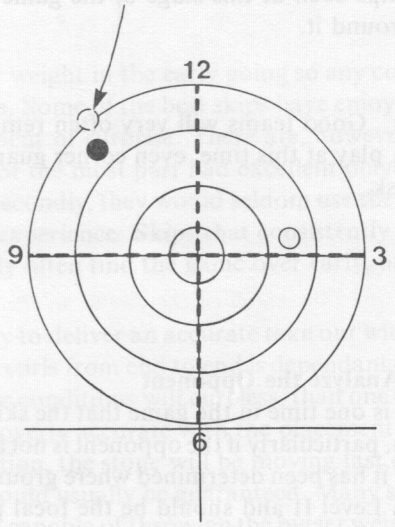

Figure 11

Situation #2 Shown in Fig. 12 — It is end number one, you are throwing black stones and the second player is throwing his/her last rock of the end. The opponent is sitting with one stone about four feet in front of the circles at the 1:00 o'clock position. This situation was mentioned previously and the following is roughly how the solution should be considered. First, if you have a strong hitting team you will remove the stone in front and roll out yourself. However, should your team possess the normal combination of hit and draw, draw to the opposite side, especially if the second's first rock of the end was a draw. If solution two is chosen you are committed, since a roll out at any point during the exchange of hits that will likely follow could give the opposition the opportunity of drawing to the other side behind the guard.

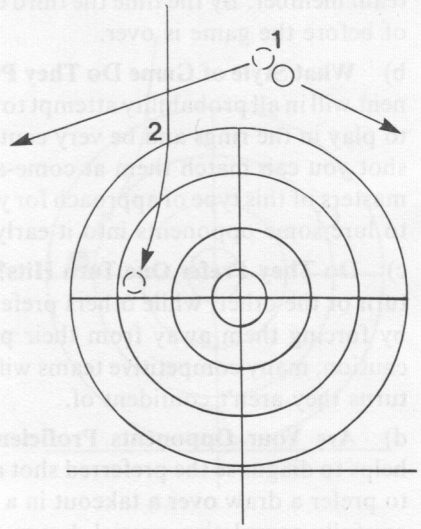

Figure 12

Situation #3 Shown in Fig. 13 — The stones are positioned as illustrated. You are throwing white stones and playing in the first end without last rock advantage. As skip you are about to deliver your first rock of the end. What options do you have before you? The possible considerations might go as follows:

a) hit rock A,

b) remove rock C,

c) play a come-around freeze on B.

For starters you are in some difficulty. To not make the right move could provide even more trouble. Again, you

are playing in the first end and giving up two may not spell disaster, but more than two just might. With this in mind the safe shot is to play the open hit on A and attempt to roll into the four. Many times in curling the best strategy is to hit second shot. From this point the opponent is forced to make a play on your stone and could possibly roll out. Hitting C and rolling out could give the opponent a clear chance to pick up three, however there is also the argument that hitting A and rolling out could find the opposition drawing behind C for the second time and leaving you in a great deal of difficulty. But that is a risk you must take, and remember it is the first end, drawing around C for the second time is a very difficult shot and if they didn't make it perfect they could set you up for a possible double or even rub on the front guard. The one shot that most definitely should not be tried is the come-around freeze to rock B. Remember it is the first end and you are about to attempt one of the most difficult shots in the game of curling, the freeze. It could be made almost perfectly and the opponent could still have an opportunity for a shot at two.

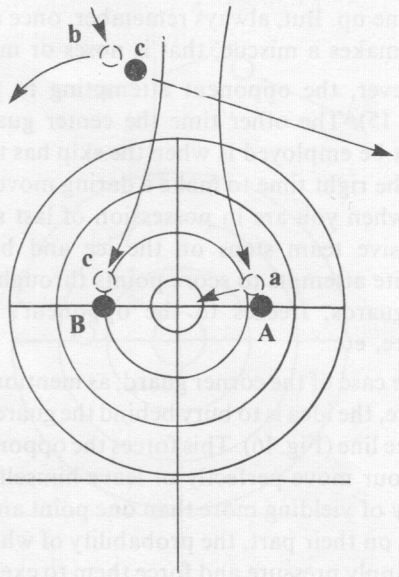

Figure 13

Situation #5 Shown in Fig. 14 — The rocks are positioned as shown in Fig. 14 and it is the second end. You are throwing white stones and do not have last rock. As yet there is no score in the game. The options available to you as your third player is about to deliver his/her last rock are:

a) hit C,

b) come-around A,

c) guard B.

This is a very common situation and again the key to remember is, the game is young and the players may still be uncertain of draw weight. So, the no risk shot at this time is the take out on C. The draw around A might not be a bad decision later in the game but for the most part is an unnecessary gamble. The same with the guard on B. The guard on B might be attempted later in the game if you were down points and desperate to steal.

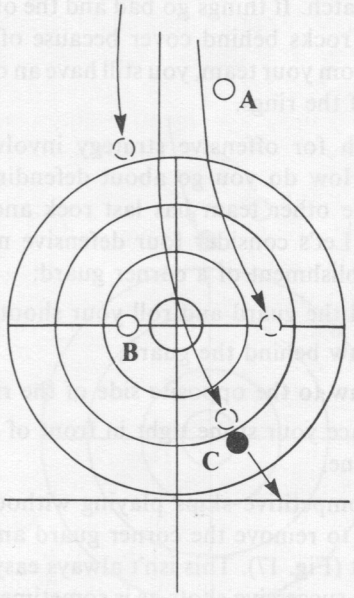

Figure 14

C. Ends Four — Seven or the Middle Ends

Now, you are at the point in the game where deliberate offence is attempted if required. There are some basic principles and rules to follow with a few rare exceptions as in the early ends.

1. **Down Four or More** — When down this number of points you must go into a very daring type of game with and without last stone. There is no point in trying any type of defence at all, at least until such time as the lost points have in fact been regained. The key here is to get as many stones in play as possible and use whatever means necessary to accomplish the task. Keep in mind at this point that opponent rocks are as valuable as your own. DON'T REMOVE THEM.

2. **Score is Close** — When we say close, we mean within one or two points up or down. This is when few chances are usually taken without last stone, a primarily defensive type of play is generally used. Rather than place the first stone out in front as a center guard, the more common approach is to have the lead player draw the stone into the four foot circle. There are however, exceptions. An example might be the situation where you know the opponent plays a very defensive style of game, and will attempt to remove the guard even if you put one up. So,

put one up. But, always remember, once a center guard has been positioned you're committed and if the opponent makes a miscue, that is noses or misses, you are forced to play the steal.

However, the opponent attempting to peel, could hit and roll to the outside, establishing a corner guard (Fig. 15). The other time the center guard philosophy might be employed is when the skip has the feeling that, it is the right time to make a daring move. Nevertheless, it is when you are in possession of last stone that your offensive team steps on the ice and begins to make definite attempts to score points through the use of corner guards, freezes to the opponent's stones behind the tee, etc.

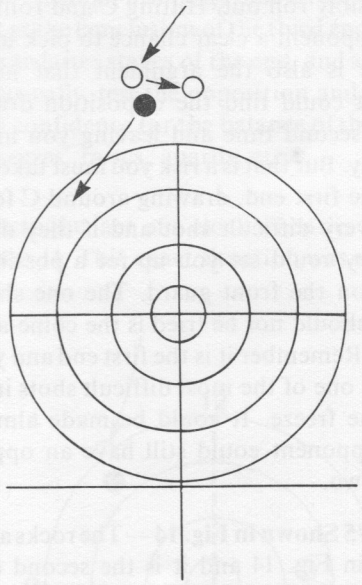

Figure 15

In the case of the corner guard, as mentioned many times before, the idea is to bury behind the guard and in front of the tee line (Fig. 16). This forces the opponent to counteract your move perfectly or leave himself/herself in jeopardy of yielding more than one point an end. A further error on their part, the probability of which increases as you apply pressure and force them to execute more difficult shots, will open the door for an opportunity to score a big end. There is a key to all this however. The key is an escape hatch. If things go bad and the other team winds up with rocks behind cover because of some untimely misses from your team, you still have an open draw to the center of the rings.

So much for offensive strategy involving the corner guard. How do you go about defending such a move when the other team has last rock and the tables are turned? Let's consider four defensive moves following the establishment of a corner guard;

a) kill the guard and roll your shooter out of play,

b) draw behind the guard,

c) draw to the opposite side of the rings,

d) place your stone tight in front of the rings on the center line.

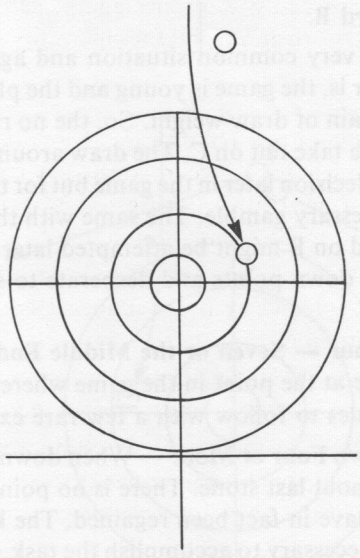

Figure 16

Most competitive skips playing without last rock will attempt to remove the corner guard and roll their own rock out (Fig. 17). This isn't always easy to do, particularly for successive shots as is sometimes required in the late ends. Hitting the guard on the nose does not change the situation, and if your shooter kills the guard but rolls across to the other side and remains as another guard you're still in trouble.

Some skips will attempt to beat their opponents behind the guard, figuring that if the stone is placed properly it will practically nullify the use of the guard to your rival. This, generally speaking, is an improper approach because if the shot isn't placed perfectly there are no other options. Too deep and the opponent is left backing as well as cover. Too short and you leave more cover. The opponent's original idea with the guard was to draw stones behind it and they don't mind how many there are back there. In fact, the more there are in play, the better their chances of scoring the big end. Don't forget they

have last rock advantage and the open four foot. Drawing to the opposite side of the rings, away from the guard, is another dangerous defence for a skip who is reluctant to keep peeling those guards. The idea behind the move is to force your opponent to remove your rock in the rings and enter into a hitting exchange that will occupy their attention and keep it away from the corner guard. Of course should you roll out on a hit, or roll across the rings behind the teeline, you're back in trouble. The guard hasn't walked away by itself.

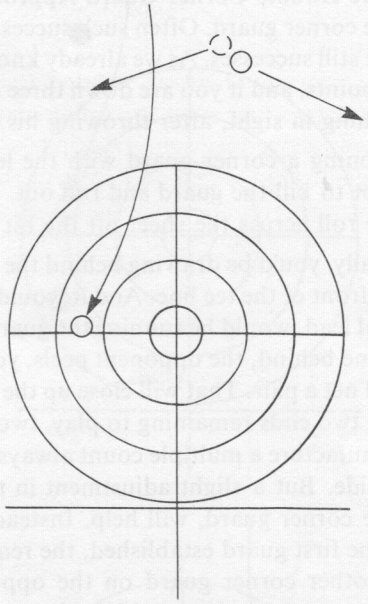

Figure 17

Dropping your own short is a move to counter-attack and also to deprive the skip with last rock of his/her open avenue to the four foot (Fig. 18). In a tight game and in late ends, it is a popular move because the team without last rock is often faced with the necessity of stealing a point to enhance its position. It's likely the opponent will play the peel and roll over to add additional cover in the corner. If he/she misses completely, or noses your guard, then you're committed to drawing behind and playing to steal. The advisability of such a move depends on the scoreboard. It's generally not recommended for the middle ends. Unless you are desperate all options except (a) involve risk.

3. **Up Two or More** — This is the time to play a complete wide open defensive type of game. THERE IS NO LONGER A NEED FOR YOU TO SCORE POINTS, ONLY TO KEEP THE OPPONENT FROM REACHING YOU. Play strong takeout and keep everything clean. Avoid getting caught up in any sort of a draw game, especially a corner-guard game, without last stone. Use firm weight for open hits to be absolutely certain.

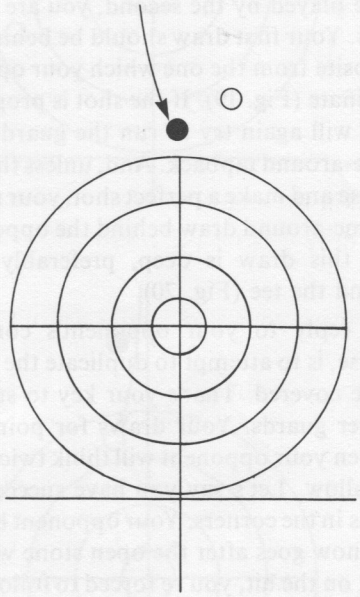

Figure 18

4. **Middle Ends Offence** — There are two basic situations which will develop during a curling game that dictate a need for an aggressive offensive strategy. It's necessary to be offensive minded if;

a) the score is close and you need more than one point somewhere in the immediate future if you hope to win, and

b) you're down three or more points and a number of stones must be counted or defeat is certain.

Let's discuss the former situation. Of the two, it is the one which creates the greatest controversy. In a close game, many skips tend to operate to extremes — either gamble too much when it isn't really necessary, or employ the ultra-conservative approach when a slight chance might be taken.

As previously mentioned take the offensive approach only when in possession of last rock, unless desperate. Also, you must have that four foot weight and remain aware of the fact a path has to be kept clear to the four-foot just in case the situation demands you draw there with your last rock to save the end.

As mentioned many times before the corner guard is today's most popular weapon of offensive strategy in curling. Once it has been established you simply wait for the opposition to make a slight error. Unfortunately, as is the case with all curling strategy, it's imperative the opponent makes an error. If he doesn't err, it's pretty difficult to make any kind of strategy pay off. Strategy, of course, is chosen with a view toward making the most of the opponent's slip.

5. **The Double Corner Guard Approach** — A sometimes successful tactic used in competitive curling is the double corner guard. Often such successes are the result of good luck rather than good management. However, they're still successes. As we already know the main purpose of dropping corner guards is to aid in scoring two or more points, and if you are down three or more. It's likely your opponent will be playing defensively, or hitting everything in sight, after throwing his/her first rock through the rings on purpose.

Positioning a corner guard with the lead's first rock generates some offence right away. The opponent will attempt to kill the guard and roll out. Hopefully he/she will hit the guard on the nose, miss it completely, or maybe roll across the sheet off the hit to remain as a potential corner guard on the other side.

Normally, you'd be drawing behind the corner guard should one be left there. The perfect shot would be hidden, but in front of the tee line. And it would set up a potential two points for you because the opponent, with a substantial lead, would be running the guard again, hoping to get a long double kill or at least remove the guard. So, with one behind, the opponent peels, you draw the other side, and a subsequently successful exchange of shots should net a pair. That will close up the score, but, if the game has moved along to the point where there are only one or two ends remaining to play, two points may not be enough. Three or more is what you need. Granted, to manufacture a multiple count always requires luck on your side. But a slight adjustment in tactics, placing a double corner guard, will help. Instead of drawing behind the first guard established, the required move is to lay another corner guard on the opposite side of the sheet, so you have draws with both turns covered. Then, you again wait for a miss. And if you hope to score the big end, you'll need a nose hit or complete miss from the opposition in relatively short order. Assuming things work out and you haven't advanced past the last stone to be played by the second, you are ready to go for the rings. Your first draw should be behind the corner guard opposite from the one which your opponent has tried to eliminate (Fig. 19). If the shot is properly executed your rival will again try to run the guard rather than play a come-around tapback. And, unless they choose the latter course and make a perfect shot, your next move is to play a come-around draw behind the opposite guard, making sure this draw is deep, preferably second shot, and behind the tee (Fig. 20).

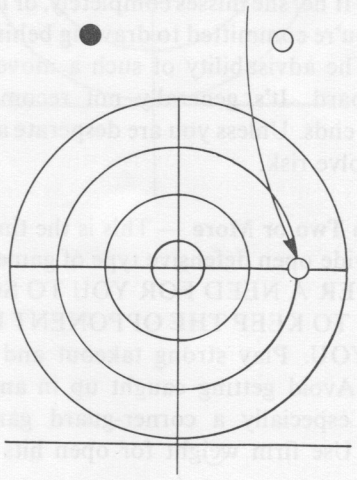

Figure 19

The reply to your opponent's come-around tap, of course, is to attempt to duplicate the shot and leave your stone covered. That's your key to successfully utilizing corner guards. Your draws for points must be so well hidden your opponent will think twice before attempting to follow. Let's say you have succeeded in getting two rocks in the corners. Your opponent has peeled the guard and now goes after the open stone which is shot. If they stick on the hit, you're forced to follow and duplicate the shot.

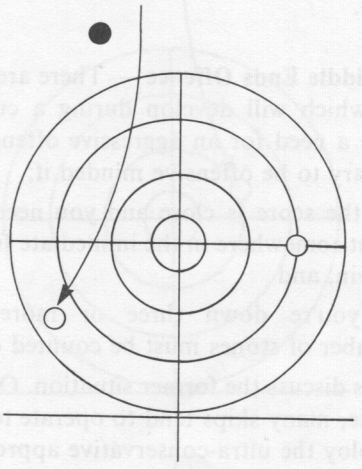

Figure 20

But, if they roll off, you immediately draw, again, behind the other guard, only this time, in front of the tee (Fig. 21). Now you can see the reason for being deep with your first draw to the other side. You have two stones buried in the corner and your opponent either plays a come-around freeze, and by doing so risks being hit with a big end, or attempts to run the guard and spill as much granite as possible.

Chances are you'll be left with a free draw to the other side to suit three rocks (Fig. 22). And, barring unfore-

seen circumstances like doubles or fortunate rolls, you should be in shape to count at least three.

If you need points never be afraid to duplicate a bury behind a guard if you get a miss. Two rocks behind the guard are better than one and your opponents problems haven't decreased.

Remember, the key to scoring points is to have as much granite lying around as possible. And that means in the rings, or in front. And it doesn't matter whose rocks are lying around. If you can get yours either in front of them (if they're in the rings) or behind them (if they're in front), you're on the right track to scoring points.

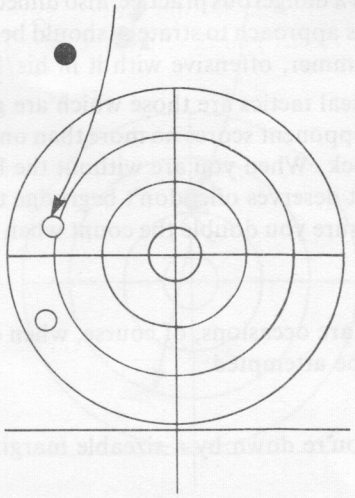

Figure 21

6. **When and How to Steal in the Middle Ends** — Many skips make the gross mistake of attempting to steal points every time the opponent holds last rock advantage. Going for the steal however, is a risky business, probably too risky unless you are behind on the scoreboard or absolutely require a point at a particular time to gain control of the game. Skips plotting to steal will drop their leads' first stones out in front of the rings, hopefully stationed on a piece of the center line so that cover can be established for the button. The obvious counter move for the opponent is to have the lead peel off the rival guard. Many ends of this type alternate drawing of guards and peeling them off with only a nose hit or a complete miss changing the mode of attack. Should the guarding player miscue in placing a short rock, of course tactics are immediately revamped. If he/she is too deep and draws the rings his/her team will almost certainly be bound for a hitting exchange.

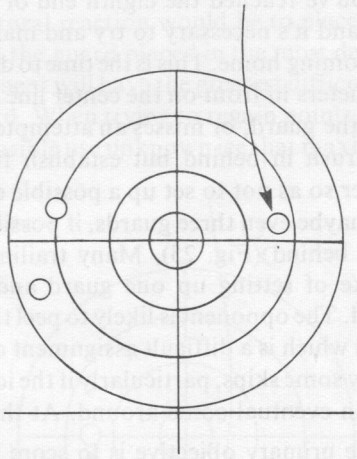

Figure 22

But what happens if the rock has the perfect weight yet curls a 3.04 dm or 6.08 dm off the center line? Or, it remains on the center line, but barely crosses the hogline?

Rather than peel these guards, the opponent with the hammer may choose to draw around (Fig. 23). Right now the guarding team is committed to a come-around match which sometimes gives the team with last rock every opportunity to score a decisive end. The same situation may develop if the opponent rolls to establish a corner guard after peeling a short guard (Fig. 24). The originator of the guarding strategy will continue to place guards on the center line but one slight error and the opponent will be drawing in behind the corner.

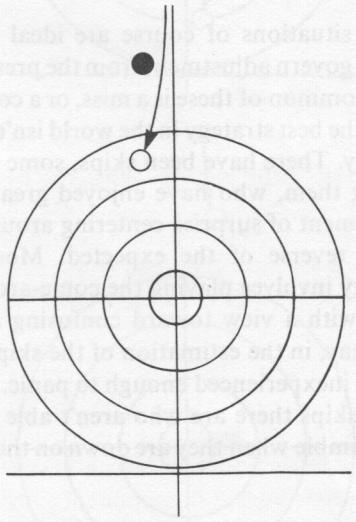

Figure 23

Another route into a come-around battle, which, it should be reiterated, can be sudden death for the team without the hammer, develops when the opponent is not successful in removing the cover, and may attempt to be first in behind. So, dropping short guards on the center may be the correct first step in an attempt to steal points, but the skip should be prepared for the consequences. He/she must be certain the gamble is not only necessary, but timely. Attempting to steal each time you have last

rock is a dangerous practice, also unnecessary. In general, a skip's approach to strategy should be defensive without the hammer, offensive with it in his/her possession.

The ideal tactics are those which are geared to assuring your opponent scores no more than one when he/she has last rock. When you are without the hammer, your opponent deserves one, don't begrudge them the one. Just make sure you double the count when you have the final shot.

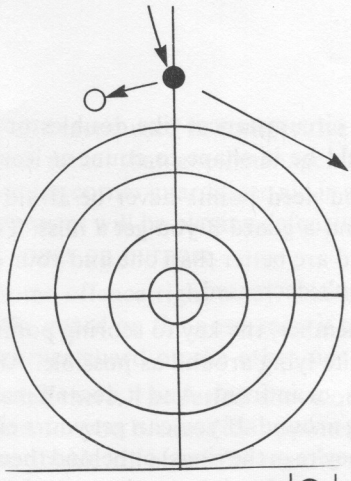

Figure 24

There are occasions, of course, when deliberate stealing must be attempted:

a) you're down by a sizeable margin, or

b) you've reached the eighth end or beyond in a close game and it's necessary to try and maneuver for the last rock coming home. This is the time to drop your first rock four meters in front on the center line. If your opponent noses the guard, or misses an attempted peel altogether, don't rush in behind but establish further cover in a manner so as not to set up a possible double kill. Set up two, maybe even three guards, if possible, prior to drawing in behind (Fig. 25). Many trailing skips make the mistake of setting up one guard and then ducking in behind. The opponent is likely to peel the guard with his/her next shot and now five or six perfect guards must be placed which is a difficult assignment on any sheet of ice. Going behind a single guard is however used on occasion by some skips, particularly if the ice is running straight which means the placement of guards might be easier than an eventual come-around. At this point, remember two factors:

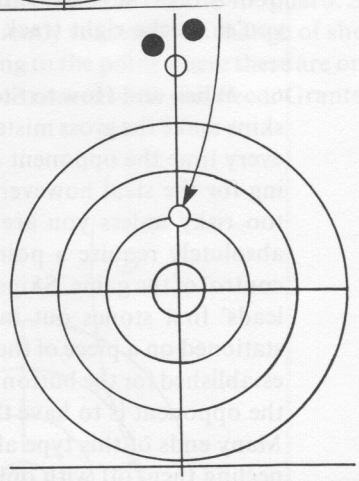

Figure 25

a) the primary objective is to score one point, and

b) gambling to steal is essential so don't turn back, switching to a defensive pattern if things momentarily begin to look bad.

These situations of course are ideal and many occurrences govern adjustment from the prescribed norm. The most common of these is a miss, or a collection of misses, when the best strategy in the world isn't going to help you anyway. There have been skips, some of the game's best among them, who have enjoyed great success through the element of surprise centering around strategy which is the reverse of the expected. Most of this reverse strategy involves playing the come-around game at odd times with a view toward confusing an opposing skip who may, in the estimation of the skip choosing tactics, be just inexperienced enough to panic. It is amazing how many skips there are who aren't able to take a 100 per cent gamble when they are down on the score board. Too

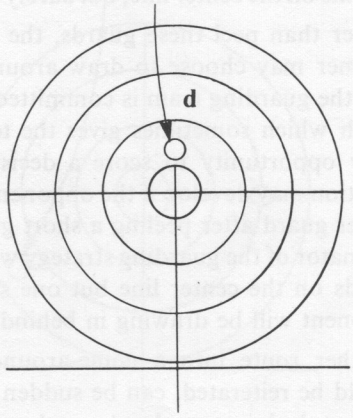

Figure 26

often, teams are ultra-conservative and such a style rarely is effective. When you are fighting from behind, the more rocks in play the better, including opposition rocks. Let's take a hypothetical situation: You're three down playing the sixth end and have last rock (Fig. 26). There are three approaches to the situation:

a) place a guard,

b) freeze to the shot rock, and

c) tap the stone to the back of the rings (Fig. 27).

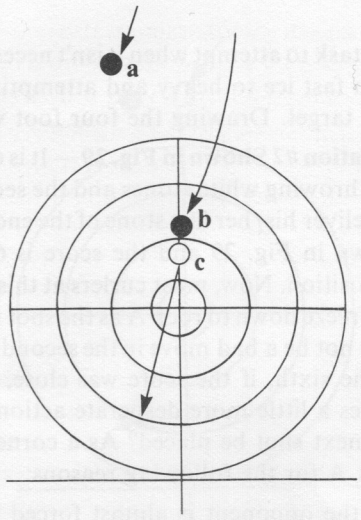

Figure 27

One thing is certain, you don't want to remove the rival rock. Now, say your opponent chooses instead to have his/her lead throw the initial rock through the rings. The natural reaction would be to place a corner guard. However, this might be varied in this particular situation and the guard placed in the most desirable position. What is the most desirable positon? Where you think the opponent will have the greatest difficulty removing the stone. On occasion this may even at this point be a center guard. When trying to regain points, remember, confuse things by retaining as many rocks in play as possible. If feasible use unknown ice that maximizes guard peel errors.

7. **Middle End Examples — Situation #1 Shown in Fig. 28** — You are playing in the fifth end and last rock belongs to the team throwing white stones, which is you. Your third player is about to deliver his/her first rock of the end and the score is 4-3 in favour of the opponent. With the stones positioned as in the figure, which of the following options would you choose for the third player to throw?

a) draw to the back of the eight foot to the six o'clock position,

b) come-around C again, or

c) draw the opposite side to the ten o'clock position, biting the twelve foot.

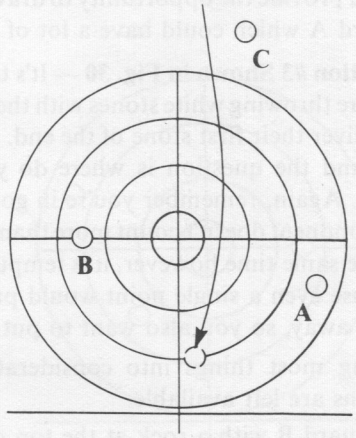

Figure 28

The key to remember here is don't get greedy. You're in an excellent position to count three if things are kept simple and you exchange shots with the opponent. So, of the possible options what is the easiest shot you could ask the third player to throw? Down the middle to the back of the eight foot. Why? The shot will stay in the same area of pebble wear from the start to finish, which should be fast. Also, there is room for about four foot error in weight, that is, the shot is good anywhere from the back of the four foot to the back of the twelve. And in this area of the ice sweeping can also play a major role. Wrapping around C would be very nice but also difficult, a slight miscue could get up a double. This choice would on occasion be selected. The skip would have to be very sure of the ice conditions and the ability of the player throwing to successfully complete the task. Biting the outer edge of the twelve foot is also good position but again a diffi-

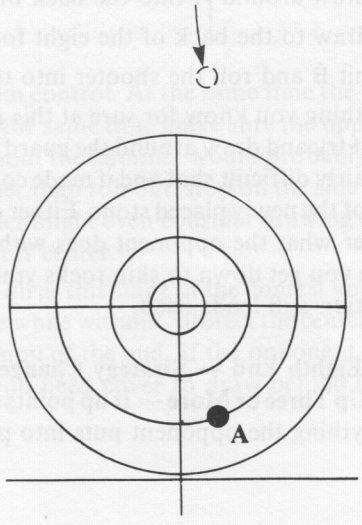

Figure 29

cult task to attempt when it isn't necessary. You are going from fast ice to heavy and attempting to hit about two foot target. Drawing the four foot would be easier.

Situation #2 Shown in Fig. 29 — It is end number six, you are throwing white stones and the second player is about to deliver his/her last stone of the end. The house is set as shown in Fig. 29 and the score is 6-3 in favour of the opposition. Now, most curlers at this time would suggest the freeze down to rock A as the shot to play. Agreed, this may not be a bad move in the second or third end or even in the sixth, if the score was close, but down three requires a little more desperate action. So, where should the next shot be placed? As a corner guard in front of rock A for the following reasons:

a) the opponent is almost forced to try and peel the stone and if they do, the possibility of driving it on their own stone exists,

b) in the attempted peel they might hit and roll to the opposite side leaving a corner guard and a rock to draw too,

c) they might miss the guard or hit it on the nose which would provide the opportunity to draw around the guard toward A which could have a lot of potential.

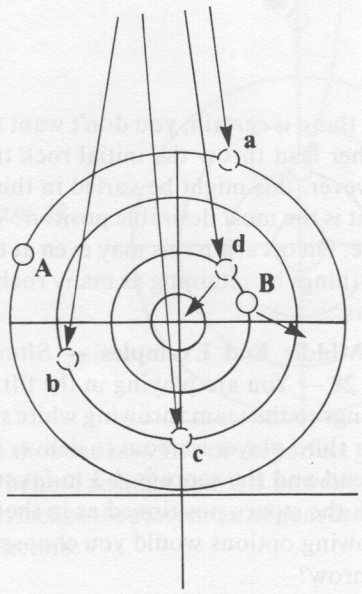

Figure 30

Situation #3 Shown in Fig. 30 — It's the seventh end and you are throwing white stones with the third player about to deliver their first stone of the end. You are leading by two and the question is where do you place the next stone. Again, remember you're in good shape provided the opponent doesn't count more than one in the seventh. At the same time however, it is tempting to try and steal because even a single point would pretty much put the game away, so you also want to put on pressure.

Taking most things into consideration the following options are left available:

a) guard B with a rock at the top of the twelve foot,

b) draw around A into the back of the twelve foot,

c) draw to the back of the eight foot, or

d) hit B and roll the shooter into the four foot.

One thing you know for sure at this point, the opponent is reasonably desperate. If you were to guard B they might try and draw around the guard and freeze to B, push it back slightly or draw around it. Drawing around A is a fairly difficult shot and if made correctly could leave a lovely hit and roll for the opponent from B right to the face of the newly placed stone. Either c) or d) are the safe choices and shouldn't leave you in any great danger. No matter what the opponent does with the next shot you should have a reasonable opportunity to remove it. Once you get down to skip rocks you may choose to place a little pressure by placing a tight guard on B if the situation still lends itself.

D. The Eighth End — Strategy Change

1. **Up Three or More** — If up points at this time nothing really changes from the approach used in the seventh. Everything the opponent puts into play must be eliminated in an attempt to run them out of stones during

the next three ends. AT THIS POINT DO NOT CHANGE FROM DEFENSIVE STRATEGY UNLESS DISASTER REALLY STRIKES, THAT IS A POTENTIAL FOUR OF FIVE ENDER IS IN THE MAKING. GIVING UP EVEN THREE IS NO MAJOR PROBLEM.

2. **Up One or Two**

a) **With Last Stone** — With last stone at this stage you're in a good position to win provided the opponent doesn't steal. Ideally you would like to blank the eighth and retain last stone in end number nine. However, even gaining one point here leaves you in good shape, so the key is defence, don't allow the opponent to get anything going. Probably have your lead put his/her stones in the circles versus corner guards; the opponent is desperate and if you put up a corner guard, they will probably counter with a center guard (Fig. 31). This particularly is where the trend of things changes considerably from the seventh. In the seventh with the same score most opponents would still probably be in the waiting position and as a result peeled the corner guard. However, with things the same in the eighth, time is running out and they are forced to attempt the steal.

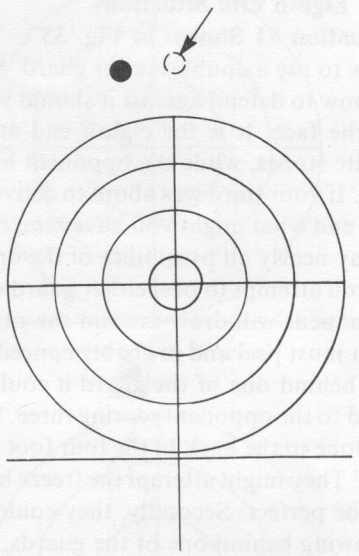

Figure 31

b) **Without Last Stone** — This is a touchy situation, mainly because you are in control but not by much and the opponent is desperate. The probable approach is to have the lead place the first stone in the four foot circle, that is if you think the opponent might make a move on the stone. If you feel they might ignore the stone in the four foot and put up a corner guard it might be wise to throw the first stone through the rings. The key again is not to give up more than a single point. Tied going into the ninth with the hammer is still control. BE SURE TO STAY AWAY FROM ANY SORT OF GUARDING GAME.

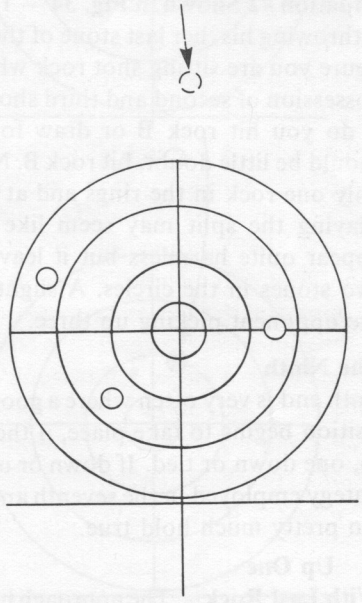

Figure 32

c) **Tied** — This is the time when experience on the tee head begins to show. For certain the team with the hammer would like to pick up two which would give them control. At the same time the team without last rock would like to be able to steal a single point, but at the same time make sure the opponent doesn't get more than one. So, with the above in mind the team without the hammer would probably try to establish a center guard and the opponent most likely peel but rather than roll out, stop on the side in a corner guard position. As the end progresses the team with the hammer might even consider drawing around the center guard at some point if it is left a little long or slightly off center.

d) **Down One or Two** — If you are down any points at all at this stage of the contest you are in a gamble position. With last stone corner guards will be your move while without, protect the center line in hope that a come-around will be made possible before the conclusion of the end. If the opponent has stones in the rings you are at a point where they must be ignored, you need cover to draw behind (Fig. 32).

3. **Eighth End Situations**

Situation #1 Shown in Fig. 33 — Earlier we discussed how to use a double corner guard. Now, let's take a look at how to defend against it should you find it staring you in the face. It is the eighth end and you are throwing white stones, while the opponent has last rock but trails 5-3. If your third was about to deliver his/her last rock of the end what might you have him/her do that could take away nearly all possibility of the opponent scoring two? If you attempt to peel either guard and are successful the opponent will draw around the other and at that point you must peel and probably concede two. If you were to go behind one of the guard it could in the end possibly lead to the opponent scoring three. So, what to do? Draw a stone to the back of the four foot so it is very difficult to roll behind either A or B. Now, what can the opponent do? They might attempt the freeze but if it isn't perfect you should be able to easily chip it out. And, it is not likely to be perfect. Secondly, they could try and draw you into a little game of chance by ignoring your stone and drawing behind one of the guards, but if you then draw in for second shot you should pretty much have their number at that time. Hit and roll possibilities also do exist but are highly unlikely without a fair amount of good fortune.

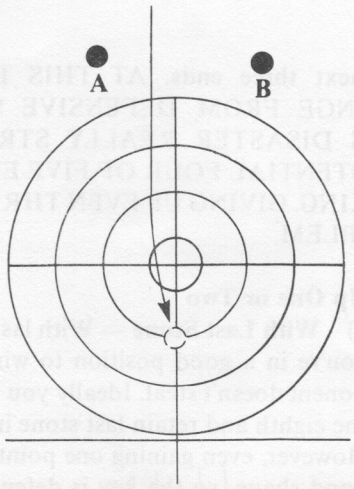

Figure 33

Situation #2 Shown in Fig. 34 — You are up two playing the eighth, but without last rock and your third player is throwing his/her last stone of the end. As shown in the figure you are sitting shot rock while the opponent is in possession of second and third shot stones. The question is do you hit rock B or draw for second shot? There should be little doubt, hit rock B. Now, the opponent has only one rock in the rings and at best it is second shot. Playing the split may seem like the thing to do and appear quite harmless but it leaves the opponent with two stones in the circles. A slight error could even see the opponent picking up three.

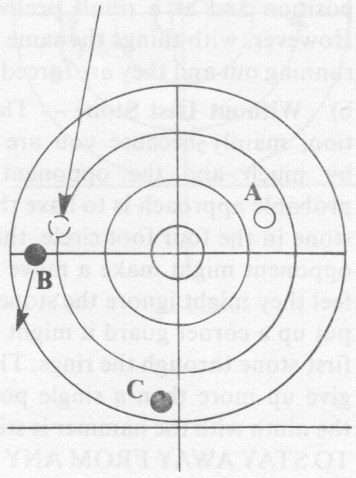

Figure 34

E. **The Ninth**

The ninth end is very often where a good deal of maneuvering for position begins to take place, if the score is close, that is one up, one down or tied. If down or up two or more points, the strategy employed in the seventh and eighth ends will continue to pretty much hold true.

1. **Up One**

With Last Rock — The approach here is relatively simple, there is no question that you would like to blank the end and retain the all important last stone in the final end. However, if the situation lends itself don't be afraid to take one. Also, giving up a single, which would tie the score and give you the hammer in the last is certainly a safe move that will put you in winning position.

Without Last Rock — This is a delicate situation because ideally you would like the opponent to take a single point which will tie the score and give you the all important last rock going home. At the same time you really wouldn't mind stealing a point, to go two up going home, so, in the latter part of the end you might put on some pressure. THE KEY IS TRY NOT TO LET THEM BLANK THE END! Since you are playing cautiously and primarily defensively, have the lead player put the first stone in the four foot circle. Should the opportunity arise for a free draw, after the second's last stone, place a guard on the center line very close to the circles (Fig. 35). If the guard is in the center and tight to the circles, the opponent will probably attempt to peel it off. The danger in the shot lies in the fact that if it stops long or off center the opponent might try and draw behind and turn the error into a deuce (Fig. 36). When initially deciding whether or not to place a tight center guard the style

of play of the opponent would have to be considered. However, your initial reason for placing the stone there was to hopefully get a nose hit or a clean miss so you could duck in behind and force the opponent to take one or give you one.

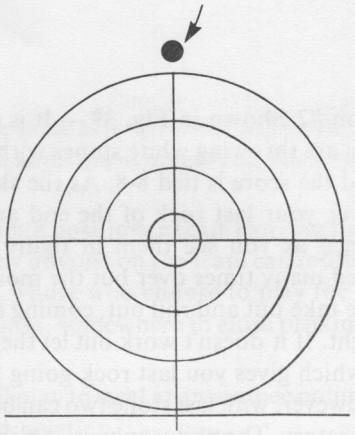

Figure 35

2. **Tied** — Again, with the hammer you will most definitely be attempting to blank the end and retain last rock going home. Also, with the hammer you are at a point if given the choice where it is questionable whether you would prefer to be one up without last stone or down one with playing the tenth. Many competitive skips today prefer the situation of being down one with the hammer since it takes only a slight error on behalf of the opponent and you can pick up two and victory. This decision usually depends on ice conditions, the opponent and how the game has progressed to this point.

Without last rock and tied you should be trying to force the opponent to take one or give up at least two. This means steal strategy will be used from the word go. Put the first stone out front on the center line and if the opponent misses or hits on the nose, draw in behind. Steal strategy here should be cautious so draw behind as soon as one guard is established (Fig. 37).

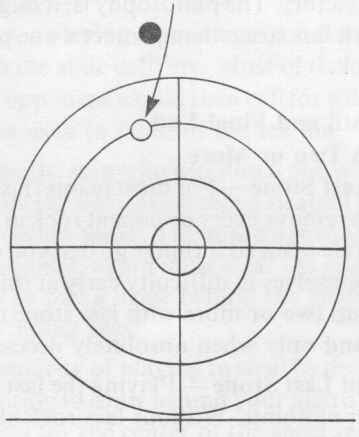

Figure 36

3. **Down One**

With Last Rock — This again is a very tight corner, but in all probability you should go all out and attempt to pick up two or more points. Start with a corner guard and see what happens. If the opponent at anytime in the end countered with a center guard this is the time to duck behind it quickly. You're down points, short of time and opportunity is running out. However, if you haven't been successful in getting some offence going by the time you reach the third's last stone, play for the blank in hope that the tenth end might go better.

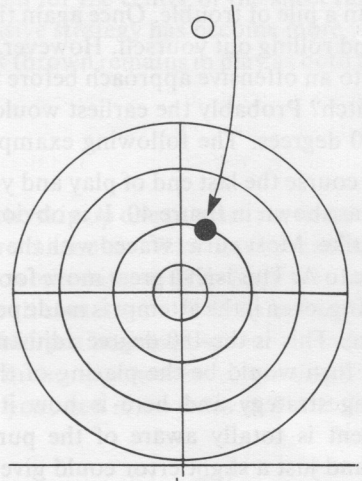

Figure 37

Without Last Stone — There's little question this is a 100 per cent gamble situation. If the foe even scores one point the game is out of reach unless you can engineer three in the tenth.

4. **Ninth End Situations**

Situation #1 as Shown in Fig. 38 — Last rock belongs to the team throwing black stones and the score is tied at five each. You are the skip of the team throwing white stones and about to deliver your first rock of the end. What to do? As mentioned previously, you should be trying to force the opponent to take one and this might best be started by throwing a center guard, close to the circles. The opponent with two stones to come will probably not entertain any thoughts of drawing around providing the guard is close to the center line and tight. You've got to hope they go for the peel and come up with a nose hit or miss. Then you must come around, bury, and hope you can force the opponent to take a single.

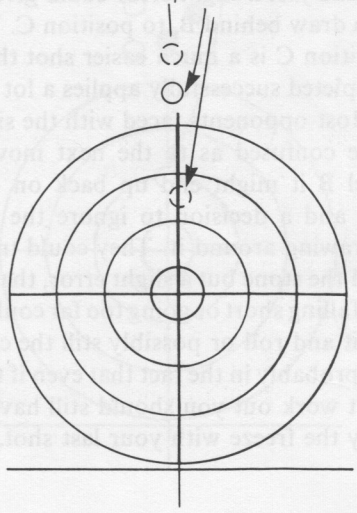

Figure 38

Situation #2 Shown in Fig. 39 — It is end number nine and you are throwing white stones with last rock advantage and the score is tied 8-8. As the skip you are about to deliver your last rock of the end and the stones are positioned as you see them in figure 39. This can be discussed many times over but the most likely shot is to play the take out and roll out, coming around the guard very tight. If it doesn't work out let the opponent steal a single which gives you last rock going home, trailing by one. However, with last stone two can be easily picked up for the victory. The philosophy is, it might be easier to get two with last stone than protect a one point lead without last rock.

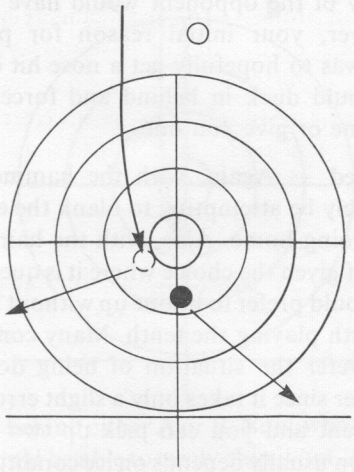

Figure 39

F. The Tenth and Final End

1. Up Two or More

With Last Stone — For most teams this should be a relatively simple, straight forward situation. The name of the game is remove every opponent rock in play and roll out yourself. The ultimate key is to keep the path to the four foot circle open so if things go bad you can always bail yourself out by drawing to the four foot. Many teams will find themselves in difficulty early at this point and make the mistake of switching to an offensive style of game. When up two or more with last stone the only change from a defensive approach should be with the skip's last stone and only when absolutely necessary.

Without Last Stone — Playing the last end without last rock is always a touchy situation, even when you're up a number of points. Without last rock all players on the team must maintain their control and calm or find themselves in a pile of trouble. Once again the key to success is defence, which means hitting every opponent rock in play and rolling out yourself. However, you are now in a situation where early misses can be fatal leading you to revert to an offensive approach before the end is over. So, the natural question, at what point would you make the switch? Probably the earliest would be the third's last rock and when you make the switch go 360 degrees, not 180 degrees. The following example should explain the reference to degrees.

It is of course the last end of play and you are two up without the hammer and throwing white stones. The situation is as shown in figure 40. It is obvious you are at a point where a drastic move must be made or total disaster may strike. Most curlers faced with the same situation would switch to offence but probably do so by attempting a freeze to A. This isn't a great move for a number of reasons, some of which are: a freeze is the most difficult shot in curling, even if the attempt is made perfectly it can be removed with reasonable ease by delivering the high hard one, etc. This is the 180 degree adjustment, you have gone offensive, but not totally. The total offence of 360 degree turn would be the placing of the next shot in position B. No question to most this appears to be very puzzling strategy and here is how it goes. First, the opponent is totally aware of the purpose behind the move and just a slight error could give you an opportunity to draw behind B, to position C. The come-around to position C is a much easier shot than the freeze and if completed successfully applies a lot of pressure to the foe. Most opponents faced with the situation of rock B will be confused as to the next move. If they decide to peel B it might end up back on one of their own stones and a decision to ignore the stone would find you drawing around it. They could try and beat you in behind the stone but a slight error, that is hanging in the open, falling short or going too far could leave the option of a hit and roll or possibly still the come-around. The key is probably in the fact that even if the guard strategy doesn't work out you should still have the opportunity to play the freeze with your last shot.

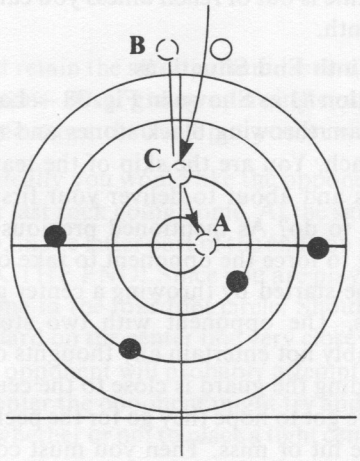

Figure 40

2. **Up One**

With Last Stone — The approach taken here is pretty much the same as it was when you were two up. Basically, the strategy used is total defense and you aren't likely to make an adjustment unless you find yourself in difficulty because of misses.

Without Last Stone — This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult positions a team can ever find themselves in. Although you are in the lead by a single point, a slight miscue by anyone on the team can result in defeat. There are two schools of thought on how this end should be played. Those who choose to play the percentages will either call for the first rock through the rings, or draw to the rings, somewhere in close proximity to the centre line but slightly in front of the tee.

The skip who tends to play a gambling game is the one who will play to steal an insurance point, thereby calling for the first rock to be dropped short of the rings, in a guard position.

Looking back a few years in curling history we find the hitting, or playing percentages, or defensive approach, grew in popularity as did the running game which evolved with the slide delivery. Most of the time, the leading skip would have the first rock thrown through the rings and the opponent would then call for a draw to the rings. From there it would be defensive hitting as long as the stones were in front of the tee line.

Later, a change of thinking developed regarding strategy used by the skip who was down one with last rock. The new approach was the corner guard ploy, which was derived from the realization that a straight takeout strategy over a period wasn't profitable unless the opposing team was woefully weak. The guard approach of course puts the team with last rock on the offence. The skip without the hammer, again must clear the guards and roll out himself/herself. A miss and the opponent has the opportunity to buy a draw behind the guard and, barring a difficult freeze or quiet tapback in reply, set up a potential winning two.

With the possibility of the opponent playing this game, the popularity of playing to steal by dropping your own first rock short began to grow. This, of course invites the opposition to draw behind your guard and go in search of its deuce. And, by placing the guard first, you are able to call for the center of the sheet rather than letting the game go to the corners. Over the past few years, as aggressive strategy has become more widely practised, 10th end battles have developed during which nearly every rock thrown remains in play as both teams maneuver for their goals:

a) steal an insurance point, or

b) score two to win.

The most common approach of the past few years has been for the skip up one to place the first rock of the end in the four foot, in front of the tee line. This is basically a defensive maneuver. What has been established is a rock that the opponent is unable to completely ignore. They must do something with it. They may call for a freeze to your stone but because the cold freeze is the game's most difficult shot it isn't likely to be executed perfectly. It is always easier to peel stones in the rings rather than ones out in front because the absolute necessity of rolling off your own rock is erased. Usually this strategy has resulted in the opponent scoring a single point and often having to execute his/her last rock to get it. Then it's over to you, tied in an extra end with last rock in your favour.

3. **Tied**

With Last Stone — If you are tied going home with the last stone there is one all important thing you must do. Keep the path open to the four foot circle. No matter what happens if the path to the four is kept open it is possible to draw to the four with the last rock of the end and win the game.

Although the entire approach should be defensive down to the skip's last rock there may be situations where a switch must be made to offence prior to the last stone. If through misses or nose hits on guards there comes a point that it seems clearing the front will be impossible you should probably attempt to beat the opponent behind the cover.

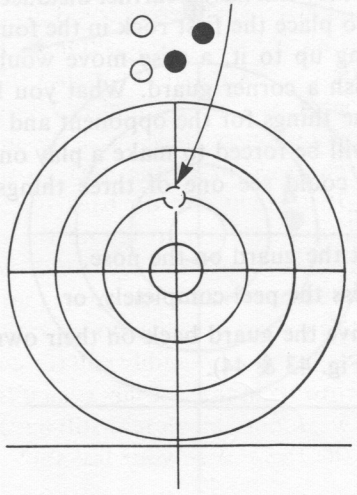

Figure 41

This move shouldn't usually be attempted before the third's last rock (Fig. 41). On occasion you may find yourself about to deliver a stone during the end and nothing is in play that causes concern. Don't make the mistake of throwing the rock through, but rather put an insurance draw or "kicker" in the circles on the outside. Now, if you're faced with an open hit when delivering the last rock of the end you don't have to stay.

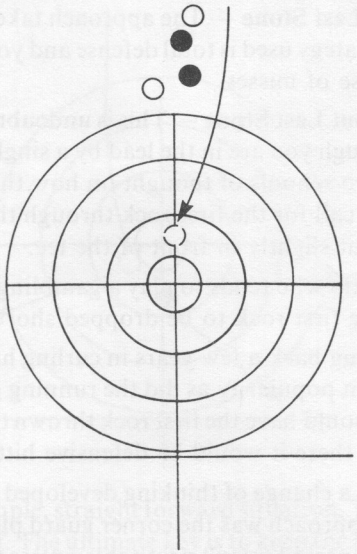

Figure 42

Without Last Stone — There is little doubt as to the prescribed move here, offence all the way. With that in mind the lead's first stone should be placed out front toward the center line. The opponent wanting to most definitely keep the path to the four foot open will have little choice except to go for the peel. Here is the key, if they miss or hit on the nose don't draw behind but instead establish more cover out front. The earliest you should consider going behind is more than likely with the third player's last stone. There are two good reasons for this approach, first if you go in too soon there will be the problem of being forced to place a number of consecutive guards after the opponent peels the front. Secondly, the chance of success with the come-around for most teams is going to be better with the third player verses the front end (Fig. 42).

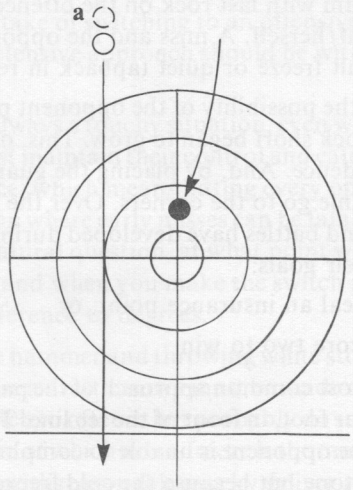

Figure 43

4. **Down One** — Again, there is little doubt as to what this approach should be with or without last stone and that is total 100 per cent offence. You have to score two points so the method used has been discussed many times, guards out front. If you are without last rock you will try and get two or three center guards before coming around which is pretty straight forward, you must steal at least one to keep the game alive. With last rock probably put up a center guard as well versus a corner if the opponent throws the first rock through. The idea behind this move is that the opponent will most definitely attempt to peel the front and with the guard in the center they will have a farther distance to roll out. If they were to place the first rock in the four foot rather than drawing up to it, a wise move would probably be to establish a corner guard. What you have now done is confuse things for the opponent and for the most part they will be forced to make a play on the corner guard which could see one of three things happen in your favour:

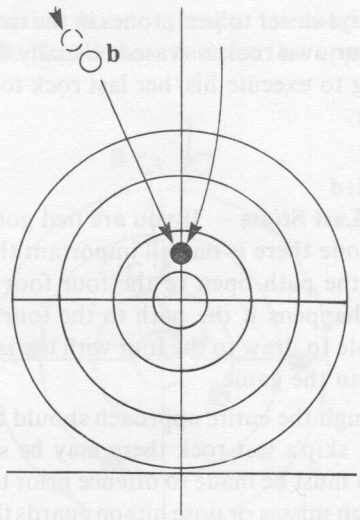

Figure 44

a) hit the guard on the nose,

b) miss the peel completely, or

c) drive the guard back on their own rock in the four foot (Fig. 43 & 44).

5. **Down Two or More** — To put it bluntly you are in a lot of trouble and a minor miracle is going to be needed to pull things out. With or without the hammer the initial move should be to establish a center guard. At what point you start ducking behind the guards will depend upon how many points you're down. As an example; down two without the hammer would usually see the first come-around attempt with the third's first stone. If you were down three a consideration for putting stones in the circles should begin with the second's last stone.

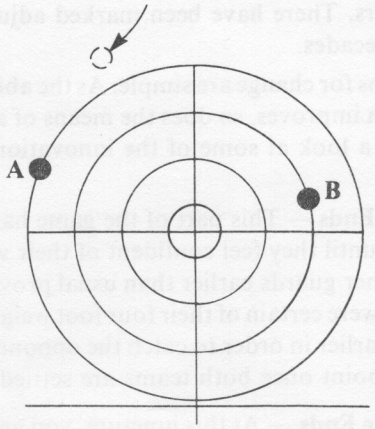

Figure 45

Situation #1 Shown in Fig. 45 — It is end number ten of ten and you are throwing white stones, with last rock but trail the black team 6-5. Your second is about to deliver his/her last rock of the end and the situation is as illustrated in figure 45. You are in a little trouble but really nothing too serious if the proper moves are made. Remember, you need some offence and the best way to generate the advance is with corner guards so, establish a guard. The stone out in front will be a concern to the opponent since he/she doesn't have last rock and leads by a single. This means the next natural reaction is the peel and if not executed to perfection can give you the opening to get something going. If the opponent countered with a long guard or another rock in the rings, consider it as additional help for your two point cause.

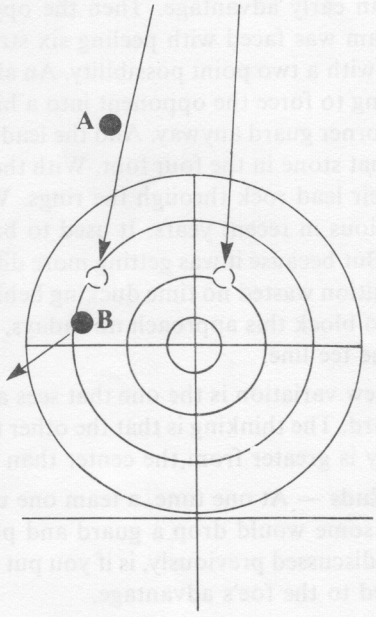

Figure 46

Situation #2 Shown in Fig. 46 — You are leading 5-4 throwing white stones and it is the skip's last rock of the game. You have the hammer and the end is set as shown in figure 46. This is a situation which you might basically call, skip's choice. In other words the shot played is totally the decision of the skip based upon what he/she feels confident in throwing. Should he/she feel confident in the come-around tap back, then that is the shot he/she should play. If the draw to the full eight or four feels good and the confidence is there, then that is the right shot. The mistake made on many teams today is a second or third insisting on the skip playing the draw in this situation when they probably haven't got the confidence of throwing that particular shot at the time.

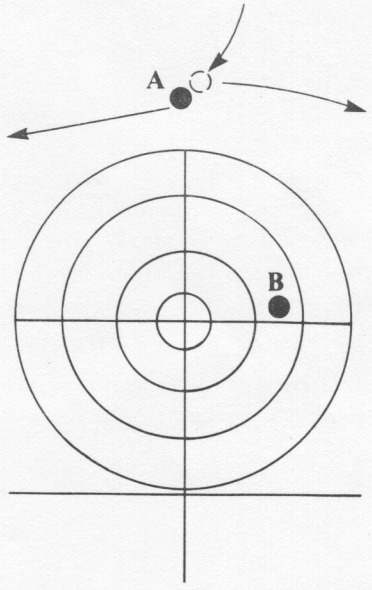

Figure 47

Situation #3 Shown in Fig. 47 — The score is tied at six and you are throwing white stones with last rock advantage. You, as skip of the white team are about to deliver your first stone of the end and the rocks are positioned as shown in figure 47. Here is a situation that confuses many skips at the lower level and as a result many of them choose to go after rock B and get themselves into trouble when it comes time to deliver the final rock. Again, remember you have last rock and require a single point to win so, keep the path to the four foot circle clear for your last rock. Peel off A.

G. New Approaches

Curling strategy has been in a state of constant change in

recent years. There have been marked adjustments over the last two decades.

The reasons for change are simple. As the ability of the curling population improves, so does the means of achieving victory. Let's take a look at some of the innovations of the last few years.

1. **Early Ends** — This part of the game hasn't varied to any great degree. Most teams continue to use the cautious approach until they feel confident of their weight and ice conditions. The exception is that some skips are making use of corner guards earlier than usual provided they have last rock advantage. A year or so back, most would wait until they were certain of their four foot weight. But as more and more good teams surface, the thinking now is to take a chance earlier in order to catch the opponent cold. It's because of the difficulty good teams are having scoring more than one point once both teams are settled in. An early edge and flawless play later on can result in a victory.

2. **Middle Ends** — At this juncture, you are either up, or down or close. The strategy when leading by two or more points hasn't changed much, but there's an exception. A team used to throw its first rock through the rings once it acquired an early advantage. Then the opponent got wise. He/she established a corner guard and it meant the leading team was faced with peeling six straight guards. Six straight peels were seldom made, and that set up the opponent with a two point possibility. An alternate move for the leading team was to throw its first rock in the four foot, hoping to force the opponent into a hitting exchange. But the opponent soon ignored the four foot rock and played a corner guard anyway. And the leading skip had to peel the guard, except that there was danger of driving it back on that stone in the four foot. With the wide use of corner guard strategy, most skips today have gone back to tossing their lead rock through the rings. When the score is closer, the team without last rock has become a little more cautious in recent years. It used to be that dropping a center guard was automatic for the skip without the hammer. But because it was getting more difficult to score points, the team with last rock was taking more chances. The opposition wasted no time ducking behind a guard in a close game and the come-around chase would be on. In an effort to block this approach nowadays, the team throwing first usually calls for a draw to the four foot, but in front of the tee line.

Another new variation is the one that sees a team struggling from behind throwing up a center guard rather than a corner guard. The thinking is that the other team is forced to peel in any event, and the distance the shooter must roll out of play is greater from the center than from the corner.

3. **Late Ends** — At one time, a team one up going home without last rock would always put the first rock in the four foot, some would drop a guard and play to steal. Now, often the first rock is thrown through the rings. The reason, as discussed previously, is if you put the stone in the four foot the opponent will ignore it. Every rock in play can be used to the foe's advantage.